

Mickiewicz, Ellen. No Illusions: The Voices of Russia's Future Leaders. Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 2014. 255 pp. Appendices. Notes. Index. \$29.95 (hardback).

HOW do Russia's 'future leaders' think about the world? Ellen Mickiewicz sets out to answer this important question, motivated by the fact that 'the view of United States foreign policy that Russia needed no serious attention has whipped around to world-wide crisis, with Russia at the center' (p. 1). This book – which draws on original material from focus groups conducted in March and April 2011 with 108 students at three of Russia's elite universities: Moscow State University; the Moscow State Institute of Foreign Affairs; and the Higher School of Economics – is an attempt to shed light on the next generation of Russia's elite. Unfortunately, Mickiewicz's No Illusions falls between the two stools of providing an accessible and engaging account of political life in contemporary Russia, and presenting a rigorous academic treatment of elite youth attitudes.

The book contains seven chapters. Several topics run through these chapters in a somewhat haphazard fashion, including: student attitudes regarding US-Russia relations; the role of the internet as a source of information; the concept of trust; what to make of Aleksei Navalny; and recent demonstrations, including the 2010 Moscow race riot and the 2011-12 protests. Although the book contains interesting insights on these topics, it is marred overall for an academic audience by issues of case selection, research methods, and comparison.

Mickiewicz seeks to provide 'a window onto Russia's future leaders' 'for the first time' (p. 5). By conducting focus groups, the author tells us that she can capture the 'important variable' of 'emotion', as well as uncover 'why participants think as they do' (p. 8). In addition, Mickiewicz states that '[r]epresentativeness is not relevant here; it is replaced by a universal sample; we are working in a universe of schools' (p. 8): 'By including the universities that dominate the education of Russian leaders, we have the universe of individuals who will one day determine the course of the country's international and national policies, business and economy' (p. 6). But this simply does not follow: even if Mickiewicz is correct that Russia's future elite will be drawn exclusively from these three higher education institutions, the focus groups involve only a very small sample – not the universe – of the students enrolled. Moreover – and crucially – we are not told who did *not* take part in the discussions. Could it be that those wealthy, well-connected students, who – given pervasive practices of patronage – will most likely be the leaders of tomorrow, did not participate?

Beyond case-selection issues, there are grounds for concern regarding the analysis of the focus group data. Rather than adopting ‘a keyword search or algorithm for the 24 hours of discussion’, Mickiewicz opted to become ‘thoroughly familiar’ with the material, so as not to lose ‘any of the information or ideas expressed’ (p. 11). In effect, we learn what these students said through the prism of Mickiewicz’s own matrix of assumptions, values, and experiences. Although Mickiewicz presents herself as an objective, authoritative observer – see, for example, the line ‘[i]n fact, they are partly right’ (p. 33) when discussing the students’ views on the Georgia-Russia conflict in 2008 – a number of factual errors undermine this stance. For example, Mickiewicz writes of ‘NTV, the private television station that was taken down by Gazprom in 1995’ (p. 121). However, Gazprom Media took control of NTV in April 2001. And Mickiewicz writes of Mikheil Saakashvili that ‘[h]e could have walked right off an American college campus’. But there is no ‘could’ about it: he studied for an LLM at Columbia Law School. There is also a disconcerting absence of citations to back up substantive claims – particularly worrying for a work of scholarship.

Given the weight Mickiewicz attaches to the students’ emphasis on comparing sources of information, it is particularly surprising that she herself does not place her findings in comparative perspective. Are her characterizations of these ‘future leaders’ particular to modern-day Russia, or might they simply reflect the attitudes of students across time and space? For example, Mickiewicz tell us that the students ‘lack a reflex of bowing to authority’ (p. 60), and ‘regard themselves as co-equals with their leaders’ (p. 44). Are the students likely to retain this stance when they enter the power hierarchies of the Russian bureaucracy and other places of work?

These problems are compounded by the book’s disjointed organization, as well as frustrating features of the text itself, including the unnecessary repetition of material and a large number of typos. Have no illusions: the intention of this book is laudable, but its execution is not.